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STATISTICAL AND CARTOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

Report of the Secretary-General

1. The Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, convened in accordance with Economic and Social Council decision 1988/116 of 25 May 1988, was held at United Nations Headquarters from 25 August to 3 September 1992.

2. The Conference was attended by 154 representatives and observers from 67 countries, 1/ the Holy See, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Commission of the European Communities. The Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to the United Nations also attended. Five international scientific organizations also took part. 2/

3. The agenda for the Conference was prepared by the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names at its fifteenth session (Geneva, November 1991). The Conference considered the reports of linguistic/geographical divisions and of Governments on the situations in their regions and countries and on the progress made in the standardization of geographical names since the Fifth Conference. It established three committees, on national, technical, and international programmes, respectively, to consider national standardization (including field collection and office treatment of names, treatment of names in multilingual areas, the administrative structure of national names authorities and toponymic guidelines for map and other editors and items related to the creation of toponymic data files, the reduction of exonyms, terminology, the naming of features beyond a single sovereignty, romanization and conversion into non-Roman writing systems, and toponymic education and practice. In addition, the Conference considered the economic and social benefits of national and

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international standardization of geographical names, the measures taken and proposed to implement United Nations resolutions on the standardization of geographical names, technical assistance and international cooperation.

4. The proceedings of the Conference are to be issued as United Nations publications in two volumes - volume I containing the report of the Conference and the resolutions adopted, and volume II, the technical papers submitted to the Conference.

5. The Conference adopted 15 resolutions. It recommended that an Africa South Division, a Baltic Division, and an Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN) be established, reflecting changes in those regions. Noting that the linguistic/geographical division of Latin America was not represented at the Sixth Conference, it was recommended that the countries of Brazil, El Salvador, Spain, Mexico, Portugal and Venezuela reactivate the division, initially embodying those six countries but later strengthened by the participation of all the countries of Latin America.

6. The Conference reviewed the revised statements of the aims and functions of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, prepared by the Working Group on Evaluation. It decided to adopt the revisions. (See the annex for a complete text of the Statute.)

7. The Conference noted with appreciation the increasing number of countries having toponymic guidelines for map editors and other editors, and advised the United Nations to publish them in combined volumes to assist developing countries in the preparation of national guidelines. Owing to recent political changes in certain member States, the Conference recommended that the relevant countries should provide the Expert Group with information regarding changes of geographical names every six months in order for it to communicate those changes to the world community. Aware of the sensitivity to deliberate changing of geographical names, the Conference reaffirmed resolution 16 of the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names. In that resolution it had been emphasized that geographical names given and/or standardized by a body other than the nationally authorized one, should not be recognized by the United Nations. To facilitate uniform terminology on the standardization of geographical names, the Conference recommended that the United Nations Secretariat should provide a translation of the glossary of toponymic terminology, prepared in English by the Group into the five other official languages of the United Nations. Since the developing countries still lack experience in the field of toponymy and bearing in mind the substantial financial help offered by various Governments to support technical assistance in this field, the Conference recommended that seminars and training courses on applied toponymy should be financially assisted by the United Nations.

8. Resolutions adopted by the Conference are contained in annex I below. The statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names, adopted by the Group of Experts at its sixteenth session and endorsed by the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, subject to review and approval by the Economic and Social Council, is contained in annex II below.

Recommendations for action by the Council

9. The Economic and Social Council may wish:

(a) To endorse the recommendation that the Seventh United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names be held in the second half of 1997 and to accept the offer of the Government of Iran to act as host to the Conference;

(b) To request the Secretary-General to take measures, as appropriate, to implement the recommendations of the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names;

(c) To approve the Statute of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names.

Notes

1/ Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Cameroon, Canada, China, Cyprus, Czechoslovakia, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Denmark, Egypt, El Salvador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Guinea, Hungary, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Israel, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Morocco, Namibia, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Portugal, Peru, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, Turkmenistan Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Venezuela, Yemen, Zimbabwe.

2/ Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission, Pan-American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH), International Hydrographic Organization, International Union for Surveying and Mapping, International Cartographic Association.

Annex

STATUTE OF THE UNITED NATIONS GROUP OF EXPERTS ON GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES*

The United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names was established in pursuance of Economic and Social Council resolutions 715 A (XXVII) of 23 April 1959 and 1314 (XLIV) of 31 May 1968 and the decision taken by the Council at its 1854th meeting on 4 May 1973 to further the standardization of geographical names at both the national and international levels.

I. AIMS

The basic aims of the Group of Experts are:

(a) To emphasize the importance of the standardization of geographical names at the national and international levels and to demonstrate the benefits to be derived from such standardization.

(b) To collect the results of the work of national and international bodies dealing with the standardization of geographical names and to facilitate the dissemination of these results to Member States of the United Nations.

(c) To study and propose principles, policies and methods suitable for resolving problems of national and international standardization.

(d) To play an active role, by facilitating the supply of scientific and technical help, in particular to developing countries, in creating mechanisms for the national and international standardization of geographical names.

(e) To provide a vehicle for liaison and coordination among Member States, and between Member States and international organizations, on work associated with the standardization of geographical names.

(f) To implement the tasks assigned as a result of the resolutions adopted at the United Nations Conferences on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

II. PRINCIPLES

1. The Group of Experts shall act as a collegiate, consultative body, accordingly, agreement on non-procedural matters shall be reached by consensus and not by voting.

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* Adopted by the Group of Experts at its twelfth and thirteenth sessions and endorsed by the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, subject to review and approval by the Economic and Social Council.

2. The decisions of the Group of Experts shall be of a recommendatory character.

3. Questions involving national sovereignty shall not be discussed by the Group of Experts.

4. The Group of Experts in its activities shall adhere to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and to the following provisions:

(a) The standardization of geographical names must be based on the achievements of science in relation to both language treatment and the technical means of processing and generating toponymic data;

(b) International standardization of geographical names must be carried out on the basis of national standardization.

III. FUNCTIONS

To further the aims stated above, the functions of the Group of Experts shall be:

(a) To develop procedures and establish mechanisms for standardization in response to national requirements and particular requests;

(b) To undertake preparatory work for the periodic international conferences on the standardization of geographical names, to provide continuity for activities between conferences; and to provide leadership in the implementation of resolutions adopted at the conferences;

(c) To encourage the discussion and study of practical and theoretical steps directed towards standardization;

(d) To coordinate the activities of linguistic/geographical divisions formed to further the work at the national level; to encourage the active participation of countries and divisions; and to promote a degree of uniformity in the work undertaken;

(e) To create any necessary structure; to supplement the work of divisions and to deal with issues beyond the scope of a division;

(f) To develop appropriate programmes to assist individual countries and group of countries, to achieve standardization where it is lacking;

(g) To make mapping organizations aware of the importance of using standardized geographical names;

(h) To maintain liaison with international organizations dealing with related subjects and encourage group divisions to participate in the United Nations regional or other cartographic conferences;

(i) To work at the highest possible national, international and United Nations level to interrelate toponymy and cartography;

(j) To make standardization principles and standardized geographical names available as practical information for as wide a user community as possible, through all appropriate media.

IV. COMPOSITION

1. Linguistic/geographical divisions

1. The Group of Experts shall be composed of experts from linguistic/geographical divisions designated by Governments. The Group of Experts shall be headed by elected officers who shall guide the activities of the Group during and between its sessions.

2. The Group of Experts shall be supported in its activities by the following linguistic/geographical divisions:

Africa Central Division;
Africa East Division;
Africa South Division;
Africa West Division;
Arabic Division;
Asia East Division (other than China);
Asia South-East and Pacific South-West Division;
Asia South-West Division (other than Arabic);
Baltic Division;
Celtic Division;
China Division;
Dutch- and German-speaking Division;
East Central and South-East Europe Division;
East Mediterranean Division (other than Arabic);
Eastern Europe, Northern and Central Asia Division;
India Division;
Latin America Division;
Norden Division;
Romano-Hellenic Division;
United Kingdom Division;
United States of America/Canada Division.

3. The number of linguistic/geographical divisions and their composition may be revised, if necessary.

4. A country shall decide for itself the division to which it wishes to belong. A country may be a member of another division provided the nature of its participation does not change the linguistic/geographical character of the division(s) concerned. An expert may be invited to attend meetings of other divisions in the capacity of observer or consultant.

5. Each division, if composed of more than one sovereign State, shall select, by methods of its own choosing, an expert to represent the division (Division Chairman) as a whole at the meetings of the Group of Experts.

6. In order to guarantee the continuity of work, each division having more than one sovereign State shall select an alternative representative; the divisional representative shall act in close contact with his alternate.

7. The divisional representative shall stimulate activities in the standardization of geographical names within his division by all appropriate means (correspondence with national bodies on the standardization of geographical names and national surveying and mapping agencies; organization of meetings of the divisional experts).

8. The divisional representative shall be responsible for ensuring that the work of the Group of Experts and its potential for technical assistance are brought to the attention of the individual countries in his division and for reporting to the United Nations any special problems in his division.

9. To discuss technical and procedural matters, a division may organize regional meetings during United Nations conferences on the standardization of geographical names and meetings of the Group of Experts, or at any other appropriate time.

2. Officers

1. The Group of Experts shall elect the following officers: a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman and a Rapporteur.

2. All provisions regarding the election and functioning of the officers are given in the rules of procedure of the Group (E/1988/22, annex II).

3. Working groups

1. Working groups shall be disbanded upon completion of their appointed tasks. The expediency of extending the term of their activities shall be considered at the sessions of the Group of Experts. If necessary, new working groups may be appointed and their tasks determined.

2. The convenor and the co-convenor of a working group shall be elected at the meetings of the working group by methods of its own choosing.